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When Irish Eyes Are Reading

Cultural Center gives away 10,000 books by Irish authors throughout New York City for 'Book Day'

By **THOMAS MACMILLAN**



Eileen Palazzola peruses Irish literature on St. Patrick's Day, courtesy of the Irish Arts Center's annual Book Day giveaway in New York City.

To her shamrock earrings, emerald scarf, and green fingernails, Eileen Palazzola added another St. Patrick's Day accessory Tuesday—three works of Irish literature.

Ms. Palazzola, 49 years old, picked up three books by Irish authors at Brooklyn's Atlantic Terminal at one of 11 book giveaways set up by the Irish Arts Center to mark the day.

For the fifth year, the center, which offers classes and programs in Irish art, music and dance, celebrated St. Patrick's Day by giving away 10,000 books by Irish authors.

Volunteers fanned out across the city Tuesday morning, hauling boxes of books to subway stops in all five boroughs, giving commuters a taste of Irish literature with their morning coffee.

"We'd like to share our love of Irish arts and culture," said Maura Greaney, 41, director of development at the center, who was handing out books at the Nassau Avenue G stop in Brooklyn.

Edward Talisse, 54, an investment manager on his way to work, stopped by to add some books to his collection. Mr. Talisse, whose mother is from County Clare in Ireland, said a book giveaway was a "wonderful" way to mark St. Patrick's Day.

Books and reading were a welcome alternative to the more common St. Patrick's Day practice of drinking, Ms. Palazzola said of the giveaway at Atlantic Terminal, near where she works for Verizon. "I thought this was nice, as opposed to a sign outside of a pub," she said.

Ms. Palazzola, who took homemade Irish soda bread and jam to work Tuesday, said her grandmother is from County Cork and her family is well-represented in the annual Staten Island St. Patrick's Day parade. She hasn't read a lot of Irish authors, however.

"People look for other ways to celebrate their Irishness," said Nik Quaipe, a spokesman for the Irish Arts Center. "This is a lovely way to remind everybody that the Irish are known for their literature."

This year's book giveaway was the biggest yet, thanks to donations from publishers on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, Mr. Quaipe said.

The center is already planning an even bigger operation next year, with more tables and some roving giveaways.

This year the center gave away more than 75 titles ranging from children's books to poetry, and fiction, nonfiction and art books. They were by established authors such as Colm Tóibín and Mary Higgins Clark, and emerging voices such as Mary Costello and Mary Pat Kelly.

The center aims for a diversity of titles to appeal to people from various backgrounds. This year, with one of its tables set up in the Polish-speaking neighborhood of Greenpoint, copies of James Joyce's "Finnegans Wake" in Polish were included.